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AUTHOR Kendall, William S.
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ABSTRACT

Practical and theoretical issues regarding assessment and treatment alternatives for Black exceptional children are presented, including: problems in the evaluation of assessment practices; a review of critiques of large and small studies on assessment practices of Black children, with emphasis upon the insights they yield for improved assessment designs; a review of culture fair and bias of intelligence tests; and a discussion of issues unique to assessment requirements of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The paper concludes with suggestions for assessment practices of Black exceptional children, such as the inclusion of ancillary personnel in the assessment process and identification of specific educational needs rather than inferred intellectual deficits. (Author)

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Assessment and Treatment Alternatives for Black Exceptional Children

William S. Kendall

Prairie View A&M University

For more than 200 years black people have suffered deep psychological injury which has affected their whole being. The educational system has assisted in perpetuating this injury rather than heal it. It is important therefore, as new programs are developed, and before implementation becomes finalized, that a variety of issues related to assessment and treatment alternatives for black exceptional children be examined. This paper will address issues and practices in assessment with special attention given to concerns unique to activities involving minority group children.

Issues in Assessment of Black Exceptional Children

The fundamental issue in the testing of black exceptional children spring from the persistent and undeniable fact that there exist a difference between minority group test scores and white Anglo-Saxon test scores (Samuda, 1976). Minority groups repeatedly fall at one standard deviation below the mean score of whites, especially on tests which purpose to measure levels of intellectual functioning. An understanding of the problems and issues of testing especially when related to minorities, requires

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some elaboration of the opposing views and theories of the nature-nurture controversy (Cancro, 1971). Thus, to gain proper appreciation of the effects and implications of testing, it is necessary to view the interpretations of the fact of one standard deviation difference in proper context.

An examination of the technical problems in the appraisal of the test performance of minority group children and the issues and fallacies that flow from interpretations of the difference between the average performance of majority and minority group individuals are not mere academic exercises. The implications and consequences of testing for minority group individuals are real, drastic, and pervasive in their effects at all levels and stages in the lives of minority individuals. Such far reaching consequences are apparent in the labeling of minority group children as mentally retarded, and in the process of grouping and placement of such children.

Critiques of Studies on Minority Concerns

Exaggerated and incompetent assessment practices have resulted in black children becoming candidates for an assortment of labels (Dunn, 1968; Hobbs, 1975; Johnson, 1969; MacMillan, Jones & Aloia; 1974; Mercer, 1973). At issue is the belief that many special education labels are stigmatizing, affect negatively children's self-concepts, and doubly penalize minority group children who are

discriminated against by virture of their racial or ethnic identity and who must endure a stigmatizing label as well. Additional studies have reported evidence of the distaste and embarrassment felt by the impact of labels (e.g., Hobbs, 1975; MacMillan, Jones, & Aloia, 1974). This should be sufficient to justify the concern which has been expressed by minority members.

Coleman (1966) and Dunn (1968) showed that at the national level minorities comprise more than 50 percent of those classified as mentally retarded. In an intense study conducted in one school district, Mercer (1973) dramatically illustrated the way test scores are used to cause the exaggerated mislabeling of minority group children. Mercer's 8-year study of mental retardation, showed that of the children studied (predominantly Mexican American and Black), 75 percent of those classified as mentally retarded had been mislabeled and incorrectly placed. Mercer's contention is that so-called intelligence tests as presently used mirror the standards, values, and experiences of the white Anglo Saxon middle class only. Consequently, when those tests were used with populations that do not correspond to the norm, there were four times more Mexican Americans and three times as many blacks in classes for the retarded as would have been expected.

Mercer (1977) has pointed out several significant effects on minority children forced to function in the Anglo conformity. She lists:

1. Educational opportunities have been restricted when a disproportionate number of non-Anglo children appeared in isolated educational programs.

2. These children have received stigmatizing labels as a result of certain physical features or behaviors which are deviant from the dominant culture of the school.

3. Assessment of non-Anglo children remains unidemensional. They are assessed in terms of one social system, the public school.

4. Non-Anglo children's heritage has been devalued as different and inferior.

5. The bilingual, bicognitive skills of these children have been seen as unacceptable since the assessment process is only capable of assessing linguistic and cognitive development in terms of the expectations of the Anglo majority.

Culture-Fair Tests

A culture fair test, by definition, has to satisfy two conditions: (1) that it be a valid intelligence test; and (2) that the performances in it are not significantly affected by culture (Cattell, 1971). Attempts to develop culture-free and culture-fair tests have not been successful, because of the failure to recognize that intelligence, in part, is the summation of the learning experiences of an individual (Wesman, 1968). Therefore, intelligence tests cannot be created so that differential exposure to learning has no influence on scores. If the intent is to predict the individual's ability to learn the content of the more general culture, tests designed for the subculture will be less

relevant than those which sample from the general culture. The acquisition of conventional verbal abilities will be needed if an individual is to progress in the general educational system and in the general culture. No test can be regarded as culture-fair (Anastasi, 1961; Vernon, 1965).

Bias of Intelligence Tests

Numerous arguments against the use of standard intelligence tests with minority group children have appeared (Anastasi, 1967; Berdie, 1965; Clark, 1967; Eells, Davis, Havighurst, Herrick, & Tyler, 1951; Halpern, 1971; Johnson & Medinnus, 1965; Kagan, 1968, 1971; Leland, 1971; Levine, 1966; Masland, Sarason, & Gladwin, 1958; Mundy & Maxwell, 1958; Palmer, 1970; Riessman, 1962; Sarason & Doris, 1969; Schmideberg, 1970; Schubert, 1967; Williams, 1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1971; Zigler & Butterfield, 1968). Standard intelligence tests are said to have a strong white, Anglo-Saxon, middle class bias, and that minority group children are handicapped in taking tests because of deficiencies in motivation, test practice, and reading. In addition, rapport problems are postulated, especially when the examinee is black and the examiner is white. Intelligence tests, too, are said to be more related to nonschool problem-solving experiences of middle class children than to those of lower class children (Masland et al., 1958; Sarason & Doris, 1969).

Criticisms of Intelligence Tests

Criticisms of testing have taken a number of forms. First, it has been argued that the tests were constructed without adequate representation of minority group children. It is believed that intelligence tests are inappropriate for use with children not represented in their construction. Second, it has been claimed that the content of the test items are culture-bound, that is, children from minority groups have not had as much exposure to the experiences reflected in the items as children from the white middle class. Third, language differences among children and between the minority group child and the examiner are said to yield underestimates of the minority group child's intelligence. There has been concern that the examiner may be swayed by his or her stereotypes of the minority group so as to underevaluate seriously the child's responses. Finally, there is concern that the minority group child interacting with a white middle-class examiner might feel fear, anger, or anxiety, any of which could adversely affect the youngster's test performance (Bryan & Bryan, 1978).

Problems in the Evaluation of Assessment Practices

Evaluation is a key feature of Public Law 94-142. Section 618 of the Act is devoted specifically to evaluation. The point of emphasis is that, objectives should be specified, the means to achieve those objectives outlined, and the instruments and

measures by which success is gauged should be identified. It appears that the latter activity will present a challenge because we will learn that the proper assessment instruments are really not available. But I think we need to be sensitive to such problems, for we are being forced to evaluate kinds of programs with instruments that neither measure success nor show appropriate sensitivity to the tough methological problems that remain unsolved.

It should be clear that there is no such thing as evaluating mainstreaming. Mainstream programs are quite diverse. Some will be concerned with minority group children specifically, others will be designed for children without any concern for racial designation. The most important point is that information is needed concerning what goes or in least restrictive environments (Jones, Gottlieb, Guskin, & Yoshida, 1978).

Population Diversity

There is a critical need to realize that mainstream students are diverse. Those who evaluate programs must be sensitive to such differences. Not only do they vary on racial characteristics, but they vary on social class characteristics, and with respect to whether they have had a special class experience, or have not had such an experience. There is reason to believe that these different kinds of students should be taken into account as we begin to

evaluate mainstream programs. In evaluating mainstream programs it must be realized that different evaluation goals are required for different subpopulations of children. First, there are children who formerly were enrolled in self-contained special classes. Numbers in this category are becoming smaller due to current federal, state and local pressures. Consequently, there is a serious need to evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to provide re-entry into the mainstream for children in this group,

A second subpopulation of children includes children who would have been placed in self-contained special classes had self-contained classes retained their popularity. The experiences of these children will be much different from those who were enrolled in regular classes, placed in self-contained special classes, and returned to regular classes. Presently, most mainstreamed classes probably are enrolling children both from subpopulation one and subpopulation two. For evaluation purposes, it would seem that the most appropriate strategy would be to treat the referred to subpopulations as separate groups in data analysis.

Program Diversity

There is an excessive amount of diversity in mainstream programs (Jones, et. al., 1978). Rather than a single model, there are major program differences in such areas as who is integrated, how long they have been in the regular classroom, the educational

system involved, teaching strategies and support systems used. A careful description of these methods of integration needs to be made since a variety of models have been applied.

Problems and Practices

One of the very difficult problems that we get into, and one that can be avoided, is that often we contribute characteristics to race that might be due to social class. It is referred to as a race and social class confounding. There is an error which is perpentrated and repeated and it is simply where we compare lower socio-economic status minority group children with middle class caucasian children. That is something that should be avoided, but which is not, and causes us to contribute many things to race that should not be contributed.

Attention should be paid to the reality that evaluation activities will be different for different audiences. But we need to remember that in part, mainstreaming developed out of the concerns of minority groups with the belief that: (a) Minority group children were not receiving a good education in the segregated special classes, (b) that they were stigmatized in such classes and, (c) with the consequence that their self was impaired, their achievement below average, their preparation for the future inadequate. And so if we are going to evaluate mainstream programs, we should look at these areas:

1. The proportion of minority group children relative to caucasians in the different education arrangements.
2. The appropriateness of their placement.
3. The impact of their placement on achievement, attitudes, self-esteem, and related matters.

I would like to address a few additional concerns that are unique to the evaluation of the impact of Public Law 94-142 on minority group children. My first suggestion is that minority group teachers, administrators, and scholars need to be involved in the conceptualization and execution of evaluation activities. Particularly, in programs where there is concern about the impact on mainstreaming on minority group children. And I note that our insights can be very valuable here.

My second suggestion is that there should be serious concern about the percentages of minority group children in segregated classes. However, we cannot be satisfied with mere removal from the segregated special class, but must also be concerned with the appropriateness of any subsequent placement. The least restrictive alternative suggests that some minority children may need self-contained classes. However, we must be alert to the increase in enrollment in classes for the learning disabled who were formerly in classes for the EMR. The substitution of one setting for another may be harmful.

Evaluation Areas

According to Jones (1976) among the important areas and considerations that might be given attention in evaluating mainstream programs are the following:

I. Attitudes of School Personnel

- A. Superintendents
- B. Directors of Special Education
- C. Principals
- D. Teachers

II. Students Attitudes, Achievement, Adjustment and Acceptance

- A. School attitudes of mainstreamed students
- B. School attitudes of regular class students
- C. Achievement of mainstreamed students
- D. Achievement of regular class students
- E. Adjustment of mainstreamed students
- F. Adjustment of regular class students
- G. Acceptance of mainstreamed students by regular class students

III. Community Attitudes

- A. Parents
  1. Of mainstreamed students
  2. Of regular class students
- B. School Boards

IV. School Attendance Rates

V. Instructional Time and Instructional Quality

VI. Appropriations of Mainstream Placement

VII. General Evaluation Consideration

VIII. Source of Bias in Data Collection

IX. Evaluation Level, Evaluation Types, Evaluation Timing

X. Evaluation Limitations

The Numbers Game

Public Law 94-142 requires federal, state, and district officials, to provide data on the number of children served, including number of children mainstreamed, number removed from self-contained special classes, decrease in the number of minority group children in self-contained special classes, and so forth. While this information has its purposes and is among the easiest to obtain, it is also among the most useless, primarily because of issues that it does not address, for example, the appropriateness, of the alternative educational placement and resulting improvement (or lack of it) in social adjustment, academic achievement and other outcomes pressured to accompany mainstream placement.

In evaluating activities for minority group children there should be a match between objectives, the instructional program, and the assessment. To do this, objectives should be specified, the means to achieve those objectives outlined, and the instruments and measures by which we gauge our success should be identified or developed.

Future Directions

Providing an appropriate and effective education for minority group students who are both exceptional and come from culturally diverse backgrounds is without a doubt one of the greatest challenges facing special educators during the 1980's (Almanza &

Mosley, 1980; Baca, 1980; Bailey & Harbin, 1980; Henderson, 1980; Hilliard, 1980).

The difficulty in communicating successfully about this relatively new area of concern regarding black and culturally diverse exceptional children stems from the fact that there is a small body of literature and research available. A second reason is that diversity exists both among the various minority groups and within each group. The reader should be careful not to generalize from one diverse population to another. It is even difficult, if not impossible, to generalize within a single minority group because of the regional, cultural, linguistic, and other types of differences that prevail.

In order to consider what is needed in the way of procedures to effectively assess black students, we must first examine present assessment procedures and their appropriateness for providing an accurate assessment of black children (Dent, 1976). Recognizing the shortcomings of existing assessment procedures and the fact that no existing psychological instruments can provide the needed information, I am suggesting several elements which an effective system of assessment can be erected for minority group children:

1. The assessment must provide accurate information concerning the student's present level of cognitive functioning within the context of his cultural background and esperience.

2. Assessment must identify the specific educational needs of the individual rather than to focus on inferred intellectual deficits.
3. The assessment must be a continuous process.
4. The assessment must focus on the strengths which the student brings to the academic situation which can form the foundation for new skill development.
5. Assessment of black students must be based on identical principles of objectivity that govern all psychological assessment.
6. Accurate assessment of black students will require involvement of more than the regular classroom teacher and the psychologist; administrators, special education teachers, other ancillary personnel including counselors, social workers, and curriculum specialists must also be retrained.
7. The assessment process must be constructed from an ecological perspective.
8. Cultural diversity in education causes the suggestion that educational practice should be modified by cultural realities.
9. A valid link between special education assessment/diagnosis and teaching strategies must be present.

10. Culturally diverse children are at risk of entering school with behaviors that differ from the cognitive and social norms governing the expectations of teachers who have been socialized into the school culture.
11. School personnel must gain a thorough understanding of the above stated issues, if assessment for placement and appropriated pedagogical treatment, according recent litigation is to have the slightest chance for yielding benefits for black exceptional children.

Summary

Assessment and treatment alternatives for black exceptional children requires no unusual special education. What is required is that valid professional practice be provided. That means that children from any cultural group have a right to expect that:

1. Assessment practices be sensitive to cultural patterns which are prevelant among diverse cultural groups.
2. A variety of assessment instruments (including criteron referenced assessment) be utilized before final recommendations are made concerning placement, programming, or curriculum practices.

If the education profession is to serve all children well, it will take courage, integrity, understanding, and ethics to state

clearly what constitutes valid practice. Providing appropriate assessment and treatment alternatives for black exceptional children is not a benevolent act but a prerequisite for valid professional competence.

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